

AUTOMATIC IMAGE DATA TRANSFER SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to an automatic image data transfer system. More specifically, the present invention relates to an automatic image data transfer system having a network comprising identification information registration terminals for registering identification information of sheets on which images are or were recorded and an image data reading apparatus for reading image data from the sheets.

Description of the Related Art

10 Radiation image recording/reproducing systems using stimuable phosphor have been known (Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication Nos. 55(1980)-12429, 56(1981)-11395, and 56(1981)-11397, for example). Stimulable phosphor stores a portion of energy of radiation (such as X-rays, α rays, β rays, γ rays, electron rays, and ultraviolet rays) irradiated thereon and emits a phosphorescent light in accordance with the stored radiation energy upon exposure to an excitation light such as a visible light. In a radiation image recording/reproducing system, radiation image information of a subject such as a human body is recorded in a stimuable phosphor sheet having a stimuable phosphor layer, and the excitation light such as a laser beam is

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5 irradiated on the sheet to have the sheet to emit the
phosphorescent light. The phosphorescent light is
photoelectrically read to obtain an image signal, and a
radiation image of the subject based on the image signal
is output as a visible image on a recording medium such as
a photosensitive material or on a display device such as
a CRT display unit.

10 In such a radiation image recording/reproducing system,
a photographing apparatus for recording a radiation image
on a stimulable phosphor sheet and an image data reading
apparatus for reading image data from the sheet having the
radiation image recorded therein may be installed in separate
 housings.

15 In a large-scale or medium-scale hospital, it is often
the case that a plurality of photographing rooms is used
and each of the rooms has a radiation image photographing
apparatus. However, the number of reading apparatuses for
reading image data from sheets having radiation images of
patients is generally less than the number of the
20 photographing apparatuses, since the reading apparatuses
are expensive. Therefore, a sheet after photographing is
brought from one of the photographing rooms (photographing
apparatuses) to the closest reading apparatus for image data
reading. A visible image represented by the image data that
25 have been read is displayed on a monitor installed together
with the reading apparatus or on a monitor for centralized

management. In this manner, a state of the image is confirmed. In other words, images photographed by the plurality of photographing apparatuses are confirmed by using only one monitor.

5 However, confirmation of the images photographed by the photographing apparatuses on only one monitor may cause confusion regarding which image has been photographed in which room, since the images photographed in the rooms (apparatuses) are collectively managed on the monitor. Furthermore, in the case where a plurality of radiological technicians is respectively in charge of the photographing rooms, the radiological technicians may confuse the images of that he or she is responsible for.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention has been conceived based on consideration of the above problems. An object of the present invention is therefore to provide an automatic image data transfer system for enabling confirmation of images photographed by a plurality of photographing apparatuses without confusion.

15 An automatic image data transfer system of the present invention is a system comprising a plurality of identification information registration terminals, a plurality of image display means respectively corresponding to the identification information registration terminals, and an image data reading apparatus. The identification

information registration terminals, the image display means,
and the image data reading apparatus are all connected by
a network. The identification information registration
terminals respectively correspond to a plurality of
5 photographing apparatuses, and each of the photographing
apparatuses records an image of a subject on a predetermined
sheet. Each of the identification information registration
terminals registers identification information of the sheet
used by the photographing apparatus corresponding thereto.
10 The image data reading apparatus reads image data
representing the image from the sheet after the sheet having
the image recorded therein is set in the reading apparatus.
The automatic image data transfer system is characterized
by that the image data reading apparatus automatically
15 transfers the image data read from the sheet to the image
display means corresponding to the identification
information registration terminal which registered the
identification information of the sheet.

Each pair of the identification information
20 registration terminal and the image display means
corresponding thereto may be installed either in separate
 housings or in one housing.

The image data reading apparatus reads the
identification information attached to the sheet set therein,
25 and inquires each of the identification information
registration terminals about whether or not the terminal

registered the identification information of the sheet. In response to a reply from the terminal that registered the identification information, the image data reading apparatus transfers the image data to the image display means corresponding to the terminal that registered the identification information.

Furthermore, the image data reading apparatus may read the identification information attached to the sheet set therein and inquires a predetermined one of the terminals about which of the terminals registered the identification information. In response to a reply from the predetermined terminal, the reading apparatus transfers the image data to the image display means corresponding to the terminal that registered the identification information. In the case where the predetermined terminal registered the identification information, the predetermined terminal replies to the image data reading apparatus with this fact. In the case where the predetermined terminal is not the terminal that registered the identification information, the predetermined terminal inquires the other terminals about which of the terminals registered the identification information, and replies to the image data reading apparatus which of the terminals registered the information, in response to a reply from the terminal that registered the identification information.

In the automatic image data transfer system of the

present invention, each of the identification information registration terminals preferably registers information regarding the subject and relates the information on the subject with the identification information regarding the sheet in which the image of the subject is recorded.

According to the automatic image data transfer system of the present invention, the image data recorded in the sheet by each of the photographing apparatuses is read by the image data reading apparatus, and the image data are automatically transferred to the image display means corresponding to the identification information registration terminal that registered the identification information regarding the sheet. Therefore, the image data can be confirmed on the image display means corresponding to the terminal that registered the information, that is, on the image display means corresponding to the photographing apparatus that used the sheet. In this manner, confusion caused by collective management of images photographed by the plurality of photographing apparatuses can be prevented, which is convenient for radiological technicians.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a diagram showing a layout of apparatuses in a CR system;

Figure 2 is a diagram showing a configuration of an embodiment of an image data transfer system of the present invention in the CR system;

Figure 3 is a diagram showing how image data are transferred in the image data transfer system;

Figure 4 is another diagram showing how the image data are transferred in the image data transfer system;

5 Figure 5 is still another diagram showing how the image data are transferred in the image data transfer system; and

Figure 6 is a diagram showing a configuration of another embodiment of the image data transfer system of the present invention.

10 DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

15 Hereinafter, embodiments of the present invention will be explained with reference to the accompanying drawings. Figure 1 shows a layout of a CR (Computed Radiography) system used in a hospital. The CR system records a radiation image in a stimuable phosphor sheet and obtains an image signal (image data) by photoelectric conversion of a phosphorescent light emitted and read from the sheet upon scanning of the sheet with an excitation light. Figure 2 is a diagram showing a configuration of an image data transfer system of the present invention, and Figures 3 to 5 show how the image data are transferred in the image data transfer system.

20 As shown in Figure 1, a hospital 20 has four photographing rooms 1A to 1D facing a corridor 21, and photographing apparatuses 2A to 2D are respectively placed in the photographing rooms. Each of the photographing apparatuses 2A to 2D records a radiation image of a subject,

that is, a radiation image of a predetermined portion of a patient's body, in a stimuable phosphor sheet. In the photographing rooms, information registration terminals 3A to 3D are respectively placed in combination with monitors 4A to 4D corresponding to the respective terminals as image display means for image confirmation. Each of the information registration terminals registers patient information and a bar code used as sheet identification information attached to the sheet. The monitors 4A to 4D may be installed separately from the corresponding information registration terminals 3A to 3D, or used as the monitors attached to the corresponding terminals. In this example, the monitors 4A to 4D are respectively attached to the information registration terminals 3A to 3D. An image data reading apparatus 10 is placed outside the photographing rooms 1A to 1D in a separate corridor. The image data reading apparatus 10 accepts the sheet after photographing by any one of the photographing apparatuses 2A to 2D, and scans the sheet with the excitation light to obtain the image data by photoelectric conversion of the phosphorescent light emitted and read from the sheet upon scanning. As has been described above, the CR system therefore comprises the photographing apparatuses 2A to 2D, the information registration terminals 3A to 3D, the monitors 4A to 4D, and the image data reading apparatus 10.

In the CR system shown in Figure 1, the information

registration terminals 3A to 3D in the photographing rooms 1A to 1D and the monitors 4A to 4D attached thereto are connected to the image data reading apparatus 10 via a network 15 as shown in Figure 2, and comprise the image data transfer system of the present invention. An image processing apparatus and an image output apparatus that are not shown are also connected to the network 15, and the image data obtained by the image data reading apparatus 10 are appropriately transferred to the image processing apparatus and the image output apparatus.

The operation in this embodiment will be explained next.

A patient enters one of the photographing rooms along one of arrows shown in Figure 1. Meanwhile, a radiological technician registers, with the information registration terminal therein, patient information K of the patient as a subject and identification information I of the stimulable phosphor sheet in which the radiation image of the patient is recorded. In this example, photographing is carried out by using the photographing apparatus 2A in the photographing room 1A, and the patient information K and the identification information I is registered with the information registration terminal 3A corresponding to the photographing apparatus 2A. The patient information K may be registered by being input from a keyboard, or by being read from a patient ID card. The identification information I is registered

by reading the bar code attached to the sheet. The patient information K is related to the identification information I and the information (K-I) is transferred to the image data reading apparatus 10.

5 The radiation image is photographed by setting the sheet in the photographing apparatus 2A. The radiation image may be photographed before or after the registration of the information. Therefore, in this example, the patient information K and the identification information I of the sheet having the radiation image recorded therein may be registered with the registration terminal 3A after the radiation image is photographed. A photographing condition for the body portion may also be registered together with the patient information K, for example.

10 After the photographing, the radiological technician takes out the sheet from the photographing apparatus 2A and sets the sheet in the image data reading apparatus 10. The sheet may be inserted into the reading apparatus 10 together with a cassette storing the sheet therein.

15 The image data reading apparatus 10 reads image data S representing the image recorded in the sheet. At this time, the reading apparatus 10 recognizes the identification information I of the sheet by reading the bar code attached to the sheet. The image data S read from the sheet are stored while being linked to the patient information K, based on
20 the patient information K and the identification information
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I transferred from the information registration terminal 3A.

As shown in Figure 3, the image data reading apparatus 10 sends an inquiry i_1 to each of the information registration terminals 3A to 3D about whether or not the terminal registered the identification information I, in order to transfer the image data S to the monitor corresponding to the information registration terminal which registered the identification information I.

Each of the information registration terminals 3A to 3D sends a reply to the reading apparatus 10, in response to the inquiry i_1 from the reading apparatus 10.

The reading apparatus 10 receives the replies from the terminals 3A to 3D, and recognizes that the identification information I was registered with the terminal 3A, based on the replies indicating that the terminal 3A registered the information I while the other terminals 3B to 3D did not. The reading apparatus 10 then transfers the image data S to the monitor 4A of the terminal 3A.

A visible image of the image data S is displayed on the monitor 4A, and the radiological technician confirms the image. In other words, the radiological technician can confirm the image represented by the image data S on the monitor 4A installed corresponding to the photographing apparatus 2A by which the radiation image represented by the image data S was photographed.

If the radiological technician judges the image is appropriate as a result of confirmation, the image data S stored in the reading apparatus 10 and the patient information K are transferred together to the image processing apparatus (not shown). In the case where the image is not appropriate, photographing is carried out again, for example.

In the above example, the image data reading apparatus 10 inquires the terminals 3A to 3D about the identification information I that has been read. However, the reading apparatus 10 may inquire one of the terminals, which has been predetermined, so that the predetermined terminal can further inquire the other terminals about the identification information.

In this case, the image data reading apparatus 10 has been set to inquire the predetermined terminal 3B, for example, as shown in Figure 4. The image data reading apparatus 10 sends an inquiry i_2 to the terminal 3B about which of the terminals registered the identification information I regarding the sheet from which the image data S have been read.

If the identification information was registered with the terminal 3B, the terminal 3B replies to the reading apparatus 10 with information to this effect. Otherwise, the terminal 3B sends an inquiry i_3 to the other terminals 3A, 3C, and 3D about which of the terminals registered the identification information I.

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5 The terminals 3A, 3C, and 3D respectively reply to the terminal 3B whether or not the terminal registered the identification information, in response to the inquiry i_3 from the terminal 3B. In this example, the terminal 3A registered the identification information I, and the terminal 3A sends to the terminal 3B the reply that it has registered the information.

10 In response to the replies, the terminal 3B sends to the image data reading apparatus 10 a reply "a" shown in Figure 4 indicating that the identification information I was registered with the terminal 3A.

15 The reading apparatus 10 receives the reply "a" and recognizes that the information I was registered with the terminal 3A. The reading apparatus 10 then sends the image data S to the monitor 4A of the terminal 3A.

20 As has been described above, the visible image of the image data S can be displayed on the monitor 4A.

25 The reading apparatus 10 may also recognize which of the terminals has registered the identification information I without inquiring any of the terminals.

In this case, the terminals 3A to 3D transfer identifiers (such as addresses) of the respective terminals to the image data reading apparatus 10 when the respective terminals send to the image data reading apparatus 10 the information (K-I) having the patient information K and the identification information I, which are related to each other,

as shown in Figure 5. In this example, the terminal 3A sends to the reading apparatus 10 a self-identifier A in relation to the identification information I and the patient information K. The image data reading apparatus 10 recognizes that the identification information I was registered with the terminal 3A, based on the identification information I of the sheet from which the image data S have been read and the self-identifier A of the terminal 3A in relation to the identification information I transferred from the terminal 3A.

As has been described above, the image data reading apparatus 10 can recognize that the terminal 3A registered the identification information I without inquiring any one of the terminals, and transfers the image data S to the monitor 4A corresponding to the terminal 3A to display the visible image represented by the image data S.

In the above embodiment, the number of the reading apparatus 10 is one. However, the number of image data reading apparatuses connected to the network may be more than one, and the image data can be transferred from the respective reading apparatus as in the above example.

In other words, as shown in Figure 6, image data reading apparatuses 10A and 10B may be connected to a network 15. Either of the image data reading apparatus may read image data from a sheet in which the image data have been recorded by any one of photographing apparatuses, and the reading

apparatus that has read the image data from the sheet recognizes one of terminals that registered sheet identification information by using any one of the methods described above. In this manner, the image data are transferred to a monitor corresponding to the terminal that registered the identification information.

In the above embodiment, the stimulable phosphor sheet is used as the sheet in which the image is recorded. However, the sheet is not limited to the stimulable phosphor sheet in the present invention, and any sheet that records or has recorded an image therein can be used in the present invention.